

## **Tradecraft and Technology – Intelligence in the Civil War**

### **Lecture Three: Union Intelligence in Transition – McClellan, Burnside and Hooker**

#### **A. McClellan Approach – Arrogance & Amateurs**

- McClellan hired Pinkerton to set up a military intelligence service for his command.
- Pinkerton collected useful information from spies in Richmond and by interviewing POW's and deserters; but he performed no collation, validation or analysis.
- Pinkerton's strength (OB) estimates for Lee's army were inflated due to flawed methodology in his calculations
- McClellan used these civilian amateurs and politicized intelligence to suit his purposes.
- Pinkerton worked for a general who did not really use intelligence except to justify his own dislike of fighting.

#### **B. Lee Approach – No Organized Intelligence Staff**

- Lee's Hqs received information; but lacked dedicated staff to sort, evaluate and analyze it to produce finished Intelligence
- Lee recognized key tactical intelligence and acted on it – based on his long experience, judgment & natural aggressiveness.
- Lack of resources to maintain Union Order of Battle and other data proves to be a key failing against more capable opponents.

#### **C. Lost Special Order 191 – Greatest Intelligence Coup of Civil War**

- September 1862: Lee invaded Maryland in a bold strategic move to end the war.
- McClellan was given a lost copy of Lee's Special Order 191 (outlining his plan for the campaign)
- McClellan had Lee's plan; but, through delay and caution, squandered the opportunity to destroy his opponent.
- Battle of South Mountain – successful Confederate holding action to buy time for Lee's forces to gather.
- Battle of Antietam: Bloodiest day in American history (23,000 casualties) was a tactical intelligence failure for McClellan, who missed several opportunities to win battle, destroy Lee's army and end the war.

#### **D. Battle of Antietam Outcome: No Correlation Between Intelligence and Results**

- A source of frustration for Intelligence professionals: Ultimately, their efforts only have positive impact if acted upon effectively by military leaders and civilian policymakers.
- Despite the fact that McClellan had Lee's plan and a better intelligence organization, he still managed to miss an opportunities to destroy Lee's army and end the war.

- Intelligence professionals must persuade the customer of the “so what.” “Why soes this matter?” Example: Henry Kissenger’s famous comment: “Yes, you told me; but you didn’t convince me.”

### **E. Burnside’s Minimalist Approach**

- Burnside replaced Hooker as Commander of the Union Army of the Potomac
- Burnside sent Pinkerton packing. Burnside’s intelligence branch consisted of only a single private - John Babcock.
- Fredericksburg Campaign: Even with no intelligence infrastructure, Burnside received valuable information from deserters and balloon observations.
- Of course, intelligence has no positive impact unless it is received, believed and acted upon.
- After Fredericksburg defeat, Lincoln relieved Burnside and gave command to “Fighting” Joe Hooker.

### **F. Hooker Acted Decisively To Fill Intelligence Vacuum**

- Hooker excelled as fighter and administrator; but he had unsavory personal habits.
- Provost General Patrick was ordered to “organize and perfect a system for collecting information as speedily as possible.”
  - Patrick selected Col. George Sharpe, a combat veteran from New York with a law degree and diplomatic experience.
  - In early February 1863, Sharpe began creating the Secret Service Dept. which was soon renamed the Bureau of Military Information (BMI).
- Sharpe/BMI was at the information hub: Key to success was its location in Army HQ, with access to all reports from cavalry, balloons, “contrabands,” local citizens, and Southern newspaper reports.
- BMI limitations included: 1) chain of command confusion; 2) lack of War Dept. intelligence structure; and 3) professional jealousy.
- Union cavalry corps was revamped under Gen. Stoneman. With new leadership & clear mission, federal cavalry began to come into its own as an intelligence component.